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Our New Team in Saigon

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"WE ARE FIGHTING a limited war with limited objectives, with limited resources," Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker said soon after arriving in Saigon to take over from Henry Cabot Lodge. "This is a very difficult thing to do." High among the self-imposed U.S. limitations, as Bunker quickly discovered, is management. Despite an investment of half a million servicemen and more than \$20 billion a year, Washington's policy of restraint endows its ambassador, its military commander, its aid officials, and all others involved in U.S.-Vietnamese relationships with powers only of persuasion. This is not just a matter of paying lip service to Vietnamese authority. A CIA official who once halted a general intent on staging a coup, thereby rendering a signal service to his own country and to Vietnam, was disciplined for giving orders to a Vietnamese. No one keeps rejection slips for advice offered and declined, but the volume, always heavy, has not diminished with time.

Bunker was under no illusions about the policy or its restraints when he accepted the appointment in March, although it is perhaps doubtful whether he was aware of the extent to which some Vietnamese are proof against persuasion, or

the built-in barriers that have been created to protect their sovereignty. The case of the commander of a singularly noncombative Vietnamese division operating, or at least stationed, close to Saigon is far from typical, but it serves to illustrate the management problems that confronted Bunker. The commander denounced the Chinese, the French, and other "enemies" of Vietnam, including the United States. "We beat the Chinese and we beat the French and in time we will beat the Americans," he was reported to have said.

It was scarcely the sort of comment that could be allowed to pass unremarked. But the command of Vietnamese divisions, especially in the Saigon area, has political connotations, and the government of Vietnam showed no inclination to see the general removed. One easy way to force his hand, it seemed, was to cut off military supplies. In practice, however, it was neither easy nor feasible. The U.S. authorities in Saigon have no say in the distribution of military equipment destined for the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN). Once it has left American ports, it is the property of the government of Vietnam to distribute or to dispose of as it may.

"Isn't there any way we can bring

pressure to bear?" asked a harassed official new to Vietnam. He was told that it was within the U.S. power to withhold air and artillery support from the division but, because the Vietcong would soon perceive the new vulnerabilities, the division itself might soon cease to exist, though the general would remain to plague the Americans.

New Team, New Dream

Within the limitations imposed on his mission, Bunker has set out to create order and to bring effective management to this potentially anarchic situation. Unlike Lodge, a loner who often kept his most important communications with Washington secret from all members of his staff, Bunker is a team man.

On one occasion Lodge was in the middle of important peace explorations with the Polish delegate to the International Control Commission when the U.S. Air Force bombed the outskirts of Hanoi. This led to the collapse of the talks and to undeserved opprobrium for the Air Force, which had neither been briefed about the talks nor requested to keep away from Hanoi. With the New Team—and it merits both the capitals and the emphasis on co-operation—it is inconceivable that such an error could occur. There is both carefully planned division of labor among the top members of the team, and, in addition to the broader discussions in the Mission Council, a free and frank exchange of information and ideas among them at weekly sessions presided over by Bunker and attended by General William C. Westmoreland, Ambassador Eugene M. Locke, Bunker's deputy, and former Special Presidential Assistant Robert W. Koster, who once described himself as "the gadfly on the steed of state."

To understand the nature of their task; it is also necessary to understand the changing circumstances of the war. Two and a half years ago, for instance, the ARVN's strategic reserve of ten battalions had been lured into scattered set-piece actions by the Vietcong and all but destroyed. Destroyed, also, was the will of the rest of ARVN to continue the fight. The United States either had to get in or get out. Once the decision was taken, the need was to move American